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ABSTRACT

This ethnographic account describes how poverty circumscribes the horizons of young people and how the class structure is reproduced at the societal level. A number of social theories that have considered the problems of social reproduction are explored before moving to the examination of the lives of young men in Clarendon Heights, a low-income housing project in a northeastern city. Approximately 65 percent of the residents of Clarendon Heights are white, 25 percent are black, and 10 percent are other minorities. Approximately 85 percent of the families are headed by single women, and about 70 percent receive public assistance in addition to subsidized housing. Accounts of the lives of teenage boys from this neighborhood provide a description of the social structure as it looks from the bottom. The basic finding that two substantially different paths are followed within the general framework of social reproduction is demonstrated through the descriptions of two groups, the Hallway Hangers, a predominantly white group, and the Brothers, an almost exclusively black group. The despondence of the Hallway Hangers, who see few prospects for social mobility, is in marked contrast to the optimism of the Brothers, who speak with relative optimism about their futures. The different appraisals of the openness of American society to these two groups are analyzed. Detailed chapter notes refer readers to specific treatments within references. An appendix offers the author's experiences and comments on sociological fieldwork. (Contains 75 references.) (SLD)

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